

## Online Learning Experience During Covid-19 Pandemic: Empirical Evidence from Management Undergraduates of Private Universities in Sri Lanka

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**Abstract:** In 2020/21, the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the entire planet on several levels. Regardless of their state of development, practically all economies were severely impacted. The education industry was one of the most severely impacted industries by the pandemic. It posed numerous challenges and disruptions in all aspects of educational operations, including the delivery of lectures and the completion of assignments. Working from home was established in most countries, and it was also applied to the education sector. As a result, the primary goal of this study was to evaluate university undergraduates' online learning experiences in Sri Lanka. This research digs deeper into the challenges and benefits of online learning, as well as satisfaction levels and acceptance of online learning as the new normal. According to the data, Management faculty undergraduates at non-state universities received varying levels of technical support from their relevant institutes and used a variety of online learning technologies. The most significant benefit, according to the research, is the ability to work flexible hours. Lack of student participation, lack of face-to-face contacts, internet connectivity, and technological concerns were the most common issues. Furthermore, undergraduates were found to be partially satisfied with online education but to have a higher acceptance of it.

**Keywords:** *Acceptance of online teaching, Difficulties, Online learning, Satisfaction, Tools, and benefits*

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### Introduction

Pandemic. The Covid - 19 Pandemic had an impact on school education over the world, resulting in the closure of schools, which was a significant setback for the entire educational system. As a precaution, governments had to close schools and institutions to prevent the sickness from spreading. The pandemic's ramifications had an impact on all stakeholders in the school system. As Lucas (2020) points out, this pandemic has a number of economic and social costs, including interrupted learning, poor nutrition, teacher confusion and stress, parents who are unprepared for distance and homeschooling, challenges in creating, maintaining, and improving distance learning, childcare gaps, increased pressure in schools and school systems that remain open, increased dropout rates, increased exposure to violence and exploitation, and social isolation. Covid-19 is one of the world's most precarious problems in recent history. Most governments labeled it a pandemic, imposed a countrywide lockdown, and took the necessary steps to establish social distance in order to restrict the virus's spread. The pupils' regular schoolwork as well as their psychological well-being suffered as a result of the constant lockdown.

The Sri Lankan government chose to close all universities on March 12, 2020, and the entire education system had to deal with a number of

The education sector is one of the most heavily impacted industries by the Covid - 19 challenges at that time (Lucas, 2020). The negative impacts of the island-wide curfew impacted almost all stakeholders in Sri Lanka's higher education system, including students, lecturers, parents, and university management. As a remedy, the government established an online platform education system to allow students to continue their education. However, there are advantages and disadvantages to this system that are unique to Sri Lanka. This research looked into the overall impact of online learning from the perspective of students.

### Literature Review

The Sri Lankan university system is made up of fifteen state institutions and twenty government-run institutes. The entire student intake in 2019 was 129833 pupils, according to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (2020). There are also 6321 lecturers in state universities and other government-run higher educational institutions, according to the report (Central Bank, 2020). Due to the pandemic's detrimental impact, all student-related activities such as university entrance, assessments, tests, graduation ceremonies, recruitment, and promotion activities were postponed. The government permitted a work-from-home plan as a response to this predicament. Universities

implemented online instruction as a countermeasure to the pandemic's disruptions as a result of this technique. The traditional school system in Sri Lanka was completely transformed as a result of this. To employ online teaching, several universities and institutes adopted various platforms. Because this was their first time, the students and academic staff faced a number of difficulties and challenges. A number of difficulties arose in relation to the cost of an internet connection. As a remedial approach, the government implemented Moodle-based and Zoom applications through the Lanka Education and Research Network (LEARN). Universities were given free access by some service providers. Non-state universities, on the other hand, were not eligible for this service. Several applications for online learning were available, according to Kee-Ming and Adams (2020), including Wikis, discussion forums, blogs, and social media platforms.

Conrad (2004) goes on to say that these programs make peer-to-peer learning easier for students. Most teachers, in particular, use WhatsApp groups to keep students up to date on lectures and other academic concerns. For their online courses, the majority of Sri Lankan universities employed Zoom and Microsoft Teams. Exams and other forms of assessment have been converted to online formats. Traditional end-of-semester exams were mostly turned into take-home exams (Bakhmat, Babakina, & Belmaz, 2020).

On the other hand, several universities have begun to provide online exams. However, the efficiency of these programs is determined by the infrastructure's quality. It has become a problem for professors to ensure that students are engaged in online sessions.

Technology is playing a crucial role in the growth and spread of online education, as Mathew and Iloanya (2020) pointed out. They also point out that technology has improved our education and has had a good impact on the learning process. It was also beneficial in raising student awareness and attractiveness of online learning. Online teaching has both beneficial and negative repercussions, according to Kee-Ming and Adams (2020). Facilitating remote learning methods while also offering the entire experience of using technology-assisted learning.

It also gives instructors and students the opportunity to understand and apply the numerous features of e-learning systems and

applications. Furthermore, because all tests and assignments are completed online, a reduction in the use of paper can be noted as an additional benefit. Students gain from online learning, according to Mathew and Iloanya (2020), because they may learn at their own pace, communicate with others, develop higher-order thinking abilities, and participate in real-time student assessments. Furthermore, Anderson and Simpson (2008) stated that online learning improves access and interaction, provides access to a wide variety of online resources, is not outdated, can be used on social media platforms, provides opportunities for needy people in rural areas to learn, and provides global learning opportunities.

According to Kee-Ming and Adams (2020), lecturers faced several challenges due to the following factors: lecturers had to learn to use the LMS before conducting online classes in the shortest possible time with little training and preparation, internet strength problems, lecturers had to match assessments with online teaching, practical and laboratory studies, marking assessments online exposed lecturers to computer vision syndrome, anxiety, panic, and stress, and lecturers had to match assessments with online teaching, practical and laboratory studies. Mathew and Iloanya (2020) also cite a few problems in online teaching, including access to technology, digital devices, and online pedagogical skills. According to Kebritchi, Lipschuetz, and Santiago (2017), learners face problems related to learner expectations, preparation for learning, social isolation, and involvement. Furthermore, Bozkurt and Sharma (2020) noted a number of challenges with learning material in terms of content production and instructions, content and multimedia, instructional methodologies, and consideration.

Another issue of online teaching, according to Gonzalez (2009), is a lack of training and assistance, as well as a lack of incentives. On the other hand, according to Murphy (2020), lecturers encounter a variety of challenges, including the transfer from face-to-face to online, communication obstacles, instructor apathy, teacher pre-preparation programs, and the online medium, time, and teaching styles. In addition, Aboagye, Yawson, and Kofi (2020) claim that accessibility is the most pressing issue that students encounter. They're having trouble connecting to the internet on compatible cellphones and PCs. Students, on the other hand, are resistant to the new approach (Quezada, Talbot, & Kristina, 2020).

They also have to deal with social concerns such as group work, aiding one another with homework, and looking at the lecturer's facing gestures (Sia & Adamu, 2021). Furthermore, lecturers in Sri Lankan context confront challenges when it comes to teaching online and performing exams. Most Sri Lankan students experience issues since they have little or no access to the internet, which makes eLearning students inaccessible, according to Rameez, Fowsar, and Lumna (2020). Furthermore, they stated that undergraduates do not have access to the internet or do not have adequate network coverage. This has made continuing their online studies a huge hardship. The student's interest will be stifled by the slow internet connection, which will cause disruptions to the continuing lectures. As a result, the focus of this research will be on students in the Management discipline's online learning experiences in order to gain a comprehensive picture of their experiences. The South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, in particular, encountered significant obstacles throughout the Covid-19 period, which have been identified in this article. Even though this crisis has had the worst effects on the higher education sector, the government, the University Grants Commission, and

As per the study conducted by Rameez, Fowsar, and Lumna, (2020), to sustain the educational activities of the South Eastern University of Sri Lanka, many actions were taken. It's possible that the Covid-19-led new environment specific ramifications for instructional, pedagogical, and administrative strategies used in higher education.

Despite the fact that it has greatly complicated the same sector, of the nation. Maqableh and Alia (2020) have conducted another study related with the same concern and the results of the research analysis show that there are advantages and disadvantages to online education. The effectiveness of time and money, safety, convenience, and increased involvement are the good characteristics. On the other side, the drawbacks include a lack of support from teachers and peers, a lack of attention due to distractions, a heavy workload, technological issues, and poor Internet connectivity.

This study further showed that educational institutions, teachers, and students were not well prepared for this unusual experience. The study's findings showed that more than half of the participants thought that the course material had only been addressed to a lesser extent.

Additionally, on average, more than a third of the students in the study expressed dissatisfaction with the functionality of digital platforms, the online learning experience, the learning resources, the contact with classmates and teachers, and the online examinations and quizzes. The analysis's findings also show that no single platform was utilized for all online courses, and that students often need to become familiar with and use 2-3 different online learning platforms. The second phase of this study's analysis revealed both positive and bad features of the online learning strategy during the Pandemic. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the advantages of online education include its efficiency, safety, convenience, and greater participation. The two most significant advantages of online moving are safety and efficacy. Among them, 81.6% of respondents stated that using the internet lessened their chance of contracting the COVID-19 virus. This outcome is congruent with that of (Aras Bozkurt & Ramesh Sharma, 2020; Bozkurt et al., 2020). Regarding safety, nearly 80% of respondents mentioned that they saved time traveling to and from school and money on transportation. The drawbacks of online learning include lack of assistance, workload, technology and Internet connectivity, and distractions that make it difficult to concentrate. The majority of respondents have stated that because there are more assignments and classwork has become homework, online learning is more time-consuming than traditional learning.

The findings of the same study also indicate that the majority of students (80%) experienced psychological problems during the lockdown, and nearly half of them experienced financial problems. The students dealt with a wide range of learning-related challenges, including loneliness, time management, mental health, and finding a balance between work and personal life (Maqableh and Alia, 2020). In general, more students in the second stage of this study had challenges and problems than the students in the first stage. This finding is an important evidence that, as students gain experience with online learning over the course of three academic semesters, the number of students who encountered some challenges and troubles has grown over time. As a result, the analysis's findings showed that switching to online learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic presented a number of difficulties and problems for students. It demonstrates that students encountered a variety of difficulties when learning online during the Pandemic, including those related to technology,

psychology, finances, time management, and finding a balance between work and study. The focus group talks revealed that distraction and reduced focus, technology and Internet access, insufficient support, workload, level of difficulty, interaction, psychological concerns, and management are the main causes of students' discontent. The main causes of the students' dissatisfaction are their inability to concentrate due to distractions, as well as their bad interactions with teachers and other students. The next two most significant imported elements are management and psychological problems.

## Methodology

According to Central Bank Sri Lanka (2019), the Sri Lankan university system consists of fifteen state universities and twenty government-controlled institutes. 129833 undergraduates are currently studying for their higher education, and 6321 lecturers are utilized to cater to the need of these state universities and other institutes. There are twenty-eight non-state universities approved by the University Grants Commission (University Grants Commission, 2021). The population of the study was considered as the Management undergraduates studying in non-state universities in Sri Lanka, however, there was no reliable source to get that information. A sample of 350 undergraduates specializing in the management discipline representing the non-state sector was randomly selected, and 332 participants responded to the questionnaire. One particular field (Management) was set for the study to filter the specific features inherent to that particular area of study. Otherwise, the researcher won't be able to get an absolute understanding of the particular field. The unit of the study is individuals (Management undergraduates in non-state universities). The research instrument was developed based on the questionnaire developed and used by Bakhmat, Babakina, and Belmaz (2021) and distributed to collect data for the study. A Google form was used for this purpose as it was not possible to meet the participants physically. The questionnaire was distributed among 350 undergraduates specializing in Management to collect their responses. A simple frequency analysis was conducted to analyze data as the researcher did not study a relationship among variables. The study is in quantitative nature, however the researcher provided opportunity for the respondents to provide their comments at the end of the questionnaire. The study was

conducted in a simple manner as the main aim was to analyse their online lecturing experience.

The education sector can be considered one of the leading sectors adversely affected by the Covid – 19 pandemic. The Covid – 19 pandemic concerning university education worldwide led to the closure of higher education institutes which was significant damage for the entire education system. State universities and non-state universities had to shift to an online platform as a remedial action for this challenging situation. However, both lecturers and students had to experience several difficulties in online education platforms. Ample of research studies have been conducted in different countries to assess the success and challenges of online education in recent years, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic (Aboagye, Yawson, & Kofi, 2020; Bakhmat, Babakina, & Belmaz, 2020; Bao, 2020; Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Mathew & Iloanya, 2020; Rameez, Fowsar, & Lumna, 2020). However, it is worthwhile to conduct a study to assess the online learning experience of undergraduates in the Sri Lankan context as there are very few studies (published) conducted on this area (Rameez, Fowsar, & Lumna, 2020). Several studies have been conducted in other context but not in the Sri Lankan context. Hence, the main focus of this research was on studying the online learning experience of Sri Lankan non-state university undergraduates specializing in Management during the pandemic time. The study's main objective is to assess the online learning experience of non-state university undergraduates specializing in Management in Sri Lanka.

## Analysis and Results

### *Demographics of respondents*

Referring to table 01, it can be noticed that the majority of the respondents are female (61.4%).

**Table 01: Analyzing Respondents based on Gender**

	f	%
Female	204	61.4
Male	128	38.6
Total	332	100.0

*Source: Survey Data, 2021*

**Technical support and tools:**

According to the information provided by the respondents, 72.6 percent of them have been provided training from their relevant institute regarding online learning where 27.4 percent of them have mentioned that their institutes have not provided any training (table 02).

**Table 02: Analyzing Respondents based on the Training provided**

	f	%
No	91	27.4
Yes	241	72.6
Total	332	100.0

Source: Survey Data, 2021

**Table 03: Analyzing software to hold online classes**

	f	%
Microsoft Teams	157	47
Microsoft Teams, Google, WhatsApp	12	3.6
Microsoft Teams, WhatsApp	8	2.4
Zoom	91	27
Zoom, Google, WhatsApp	4	1.2
Zoom, Microsoft Teams	40	12
Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google	4	1.2
Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google, WhatsApp	4	1.2
Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google, WhatsApp, Telegram	4	1.2
Zoom, Skype, Google, WhatsApp	4	1.2
Zoom, WhatsApp	4	1.2
Total	332	100

Source: Survey Data, 2021

**Table 04: Analyzing software for students' assignments**

	f	Percent
Email	8	2.4
Email, Messengers (Viber, WhatsApp), Moodle (LMS)	4	1.2
Email, Moodle (LMS)	131	39.5
Email, Moodle (LMS), other	4	1.2
Moodle (LMS)	185	55.7
Total	332	100.0

Source: Survey Data, 2021

The majority of the respondents are using LMS for submitting the assignments (55.7%) where 39.5 of them are using both LMS and email (table 04).

**Table 05: The response rate of satisfaction with online education**

	f	%
No.	209	63.0
Yes	123	37.0
Total	332	100.0

Source: Survey Data, 2021

It can be stated that 63 percent of the respondents are not satisfied with the online lectures (Table 5.)

Referring the table 06, it can be identified that 64.8 percent of the respondents have a positive opinion regarding conducting online lectures in the future.

**Table 06: Analyzing Respondents' opinion on conducting online lectures in future**

	f	%
No	215	64.8
Yes	117	35.2
Total	332	100.0

Source: Survey Data, 2021

**Advantages and disadvantages**

**Table 07: Analyzing the problems online learners experienced**

	f	%
Time efficiency	200	60.24
Flexible hours- you can manage lectures with your other work	190	57.22
Self-development	115	34.63
Learning tools- Usage of innovative tools	80	24.09

Source: Survey Data, 2021

It is worthwhile to analyze the issues experienced by the undergraduates during online lectures.

Referring to table 07, it can be identified that 72 percent of the respondents are facing internet connectivity issues, where 57 percent of them are experiencing technical problems in online lectures. 42 percent of them face difficulties due to a lack of face-to-face

interaction with the lecturers, while another 47 percent face workload, stress, and motivational issues. Another 14 percent have mentioned that the universities are not providing adequate support in conducting online lectures.

As per the table 03, it can be identified that the majority (47.3%) of the respondents are using only the Microsoft Teams platform for conducting their online classes where 27.3 percent are utilizing Zoom. In addition to that, some of the respondents are using combinations of Teams, Zoom, Telegram, Skype, WhatsApp and Google.

In addition to the difficulties and problems faced with online learning, it should be mentioned that there are a few benefits for undergraduates as well. The next question of the questionnaire was on that aspect, and the answers are summarized in table 08. Referring to table 08, 57.22 percent of the respondents have mentioned that they are benefited from flexible hours, where another 60.24 percent have stated that they can efficiently manage their time with online lectures. On the other hand, 24.09 percent have mentioned that they can effectively use the innovative learning tools, where 34.63 percent have stated they can develop themselves through online lectures.

**Table 08: Analyzing the benefits online Learners experienced**

	f	%
Time efficiency	200	60.24
Flexible hours- you can manage lectures with your other work	190	57.22
Self-development	115	34.63
Learning tools- Usage of innovative tools	80	24.09

*Source: Survey data, 2021*

At the end of the questionnaire, another question was added for the respondents to express their comments on their experience with online learning. These statements can be categorized as favorable, unfavorable and moderate towards online learning as follows.

#### **Favorable**

1. "We can finish our study without spending long time"
2. "It is good"
3. "I think fast and efficient system"
4. "Online learning system is really effective and efficient for university students because undergraduates are able to manage the time and engage in studies"
5. "Online learning was a good platform for the quarantine period we experience lately,

but the lack of face to face interaction limits interpersonal skill development".

6. "Adjusting to an online model could be a challenge first, but once we adapt to the format, there are numerous benefits to be realized"
7. "Online learning is very comfortable in my life"

#### **Unfavorable**

1. "It takes more time to adjust"
2. "Actually, learning online is ineffective because we cannot have face to face interactions psychically, it would be better if we can participate to lecturers physically".
3. "Not effective as physical classes"
4. "Not satisfied with online learning"
5. "It's better if we could do physical lectures rather than doing online lecture, doing online lectures are ok but we don't get any experience, how to overcome the problems, lack of interaction between the teacher and student and also we need to move with this changing nature, so it's better doing online lectures with physical lectures also"
6. "Many students have connection issue, technical issues, therefore online learning is not successful learning method"
7. "It's ok but there have an issue face to face intractable is not in place"
8. "Have some mental issues online adaptability so physical classroom learning must"
9. "I would not like regarding online learning, it is not better for our life"
10. "Can save time but it is not effective for me"
11. "It is not good for end semester examinations"
12. "Network problems are the main difficulty for online learning for me"
13. "Online learning is good to manage out time, but it is little difficult when it comes to practical subjects like Mathematics"
14. "It is a good solution this Covid-19 but I have to face internet issues"
15. "Mathematical subjects are hard to learn in online platforms"
16. "There is no complete coverage satisfaction in total of Sri Lanka, some areas face very big coverage issues so this method is unsatisfied"
17. "It is good method but not efficient"
18. "I think physical lectures are better those online lectures, because, no motivation and connection between lecturer and students, and so boring than physical classes, I think physical classes are more

- effective. Online system can use as another choice for missing lectures or extra knowledge sessions”
19. “Online learning is good but it has many problems”
  20. “Online learning is good but most of people have no knowledge on online platform and also our country has no enough facility for online platforms”.
  21. “Learning in a physical classroom is better than online classes”
  22. “There are more difficulties than benefits”
  23. “In every situation the online learning was not comfortable”.
  24. Since lack of integration with student and lecturers, it is not efficient”.
  25. “The campus should start physically soon, because it is very stressful”
  26. “Internet connectivity in some areas are poor, making it difficult for students for in those areas. It is important to consider that”.
  27. “Not satisfied with online learning”.

#### **Moderate**

1. “It depends with the learner and his desire to learn”
2. “Online learning can make a success with continuous motivation”

### **Discussion**

Despite the fact that eLearning was created as a temporary solution for the global pandemic, it has become the new normal and a useful tool for both lecturers and students due to a number of advantages such as time and cost savings. However, both instructors and students had numerous challenges since they were unfamiliar with the online platforms, which were new to them. The major goal of this study was to evaluate Management faculty undergraduates' online learning experiences in order to find benefits and concerns from their perspective. The inquiry focused on a single discipline in order to discover the issues and concerns that were unique to that discipline. For example, when performing practical, there may be specific challenges related to Information Technology, Science, and Engineering. As a result, the researcher chose the Management discipline to evaluate the undergraduates' online learning experience.

According to the information presented, several institutes have not provided special training for undergraduates on online platforms. However, because online learning

is a new experience for the students, it is always necessary to provide sufficient training. In addition, the majority of respondents (47 percent) have utilized the Microsoft Teams platform to conduct their online lessons, while 27 percent have used Zoom. The majority of respondents (55.7 percent) utilize LMS to submit assignments, with 39.5 percent using both LMS and email. On the other side, 72.2 percent of respondents said they have problems with internet connectivity, while 57.2 percent said they experience technical challenges with online lectures. A lack of face-to-face engagement with lecturers is causing 42.1 percent of them problems, while another 43.6 percent are dealing with workload, stress, and motivational concerns (27.1 percent). Another 14 percent stated that universities do not provide sufficient support for online lectures. The majority of students are having trouble connecting to the internet since there isn't enough coverage to provide reliable internet connections throughout the country. Most of these issues are similar to those found in previous research studies, such as access to technology, digital devices, pedagogical skills of online teaching (Bao, 2020), readiness for learning, social isolation, and participation, learning content in content development and instructions, content and multimedia, instructional strategies, and consideration, lack of training and support, and lack of incentives, the transition from a traditional classroom to an online classroom, and the learning content in content development and instructions, content and multimedia, instructional strategies, and consideration (Aboagye, Yawson, & Kofi, 2020).

With the problems that undergraduates face, 57.22 percent of respondents say that flexible hours help them manage their time, while another 60.24 percent say that online lectures help them manage their time effectively. On the other side, 24.09 percent of respondents said they can effectively use innovative learning methods, while 34.63 percent said they can grow through online lectures. Online instruction has been found to be unsatisfactory by 64.8 percent of respondents. However, 35 percent of them are enthusiastic about the prospect of implementing blended learning in the future. Aside from the responses to the closed-ended questions, it's also worth looking at the respondents' remarks about their learning experience. According to the comments, the vast majority of responders are dissatisfied with the online lectures, with specific reasons given. However, other

respondents reported satisfaction with the online lessons, emphasizing the time-saving benefits.

## Conclusion

As per the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the Management faculty undergraduates have different opinions on online lectures based on their experience. Several institutes have not offered specialized training for undergraduates on online platforms, according to the information presented. Additionally, the vast majority of responders conducted their online classes using the Microsoft Teams platform. LMS is used by most respondents to submit assignments. According to the data supplied, the biggest issues for undergraduates were a lack of face-to-face interaction with professors, workload, stress, and motivational issues, as well as a lack of support from universities for online courses. Since there isn't enough coverage to offer dependable

internet connections across the nation, the majority of students are having problems connecting to the internet. However, several respondents said that they were getting a few advantages, including flexible hours, assistance with time management, efficient use of cutting-edge teaching techniques, and expanding chances through online lectures. The majority of respondents found that online education was poor. The majority of commenters appear to be unhappy with the online lectures, and they give precise justifications in their complaints. Other respondents, however, expressed satisfaction with the online lectures and emphasized the advantages of time savings. Given the drawbacks and advantages of online teaching, these findings will be helpful for higher educational institutions as they make their future judgments. Even after the pandemic emergency has passed, the appropriate authorities can take these facts into consideration when creating their strategies.

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